

[Henrietta Elizabeth Sellers]

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May 19, 1939.

Henrietta Elizabeth

Sellers, [50?]

(Colored Cook for

Mrs. H.W. [Gorse?])

3733 Ortega Blvd.,

Jacksonville, Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer.

HENRIETTA ELIZABETH SELLERS

"Wait until I turns my stove down so's my dinner don't burn, and I'll be glad to talk to you," said Henrietta, as she shuffled her 200-lbs with more or less deliberation towards the kitchen.

Directly she was back, standing calmly at attention, her attitude unconsciously taking on a part of the peaceful quietness of the surroundings where she seems so much at home.

"I was born in Georgia," she said, in answer to a question, "and I got an Indian grandfather somewhere back among my people - I don't know how far back. I've worked for lots of people in my time - I'm 60 so J.W. says (He's my son) and he's 40. He keeps track of

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things like that - get it all written down in the back of a Bible, I jus' never did bother. Age don't make no difference, jus' so's you keep goin'.

"Most of the time I worked in Atlanta, the last one there was a Jewish lady, Mrs. Creeks. Then Mrs. [Gorse?] she hired me and brought me to Florida about fifteen years ago - before that one was born" - pointing to Mrs. [Gorse's?] young daughter, sheltering three six-day-old Scottie puppies under the protection of a big rock on the riverfront levees.

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"I can't remember when I learned to cook - seem lak I always knowed - but I did have to learn how to cook seafood, fish, shrimp, crabs and such, after I came to Florida.

"I likes to fish, too, and every week when I gets my Thursday afternoon off, I goes fishin' out here on the wharf. Sometimes I catches one, sometimes a lot, and then again I don't catch none - just sets there all evenin' hopin' to get a bite.

"Wouldn't I like to do something else in my spare time? Well, I don't take much truck with these folks that works in the neighborhood by, the day, and I 'spects I'se better off - at least I knows I'se in good company - by myself.

"One thing I likes to go to church - I'se always gone to church, and my onliest son, J.W., is a preacher - Methodist. He's pastor of a church over in town on West Ashley Street, running down from the colored High School.

"That song you jus' heard me singin' was a 'jumped-up' song I heard last Sunday over at the [Yukon?] Methodist Church for colored folks. A 'jumped-up' song," she patiently explained, "is when you feel the Spirit of the Lord [acting?] on your soul, and you jus' gets up and sings whatever comes to mind.

"That song runs: 'If you look for me down here, and can't find me, If you come up to Heaven, You'll find me there.'

"Another one goes: 'Lie down, lie down, thy weary one, Your head upon my breast.'

"And here's another: "Servant of God, well done, Rest from they worldly toil, The battle is fought, The victory won, Enter they Master's joy.'

"A 'jumped-up' song is sincere, it comes right from a person's heart, and there's more to them than you'd think. If the world is ever saved, it's going' to be by just such songs, because the younger generation don't study like the old church people, and they don't get the Spirit like they should. And so far as the tune is concerned, they sound just as good to me as any I hears over the radio.

"Yes, they have song books at the church, but I don't need no song book - once I hears a thing, I can always remember it, so I don't need a book to get it out of.

"Scuse me, I'll have to look after my cookin'." Off she trudged to the kitchen, and when she returned seated herself just inside the dining room door, where she could better attend the cooking of the evening meal.

"Do I like Florida? Well, I likes it better for some incidents, and some I likes better in Georgia. You [mos'?] generally likes it better where you was raised at." she said apologetically, as if not wishing to minimize Florida's 4 advantages. "Since I got my son, J.W., here now, I don't expect I'll ever live any more in Georgia."

It developed by close questioning, that J.W., in spite of his forty years, and his ability as a preacher, always manages to locate somewhere in Henrietta's immediate vicinity.

"I took a lotta pains with J.W. to raise him right, and one day about eighteen years ago he came to me and said - 'mama, I'se cotin' [Tammie?], and we'se goin' to get married.' I looked over my big boy, up and down, and I says - "No, you ain't, J.W., you ain't goin' to do no such thing. If my boy gets married, I'd like to seem him get a good wife, and [Tammie?]

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is that triflin' she won't make any kind of a wife for nobody, much less you. She's selfish and no 'count. Now, you just let you old mammy pick you a wife. There's Anna Hill,' I says.

"Anna Hill was my friend, a few years older than J.W., but good and kind, industrious and faithful.

"J.W. had never thought of her as a wife, but he dropped [Tammie?], and started goin' with Anna, and in a short time they were married. She has proved herself to be as good as I said. She has made J.W. a fine wife, and they have a nice son, fourteen years old.

"Tammie? Well, she turned /out like I said. She married someone else right away, but couldn't get along with her husband, and she's been married and divorced twice since. She just can't get along with nobody. Yes, sir, I sure saved J.W. a lot of married misery.

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"You see I knew the beginnin's of Anna - I knew her father and mother - they was good old people, and Anna and I was friends from girls on up, so I knew she could not help but be all right.

"My grandson goes to school in Yuken. No, I don't think he'll be a preacher like his father. Preachers has a pretty hard time. He wants to be a mechanic, and is always tinkerin' around the garage, learnin' things about machinery.

"I say to my son, the other day, 'J.W., some of dese days I'm goin' clear away from around you,' and he says: 'Well, I guess my money will take me jus' as far as [your's?] will carry you, and I'll find you wherever you go.'

"I used to go to all the Sunday School conferences, and yearly meetings, but it's too much trouble now. The last conference I went to was at [Palatka?] - J.W. had a small church there. It was a big meeting, preachers and church members of Methodists from all over the State. I just went down on the train for one day, and there was such a crowd I could not

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get into the hall, but stood out on the porch. After I went and bought my lunch, I went back and stood around some more - you see the conference was goin' to change the preachers around, and I wanted to know where J.W. was to be sent. Finally, I heard his name called over the loud speaker - 'Jacksonville,' - and I didn't wait to hear no more. Sure enough, they give him the little church here on Broad and Ashley, and he's been here ever since.

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"Before Mrs. [Gorse?] came to Jacksonville the last time, we lived several years in the country near Green Cove Springs, and J.W. got himself transferred to a little church there," she said guilelessly. "Mostly, he tries to be near where I is.

"There was a colored cemetery not far away, and one day I went down there to a man's funeral - he had been a good sanctified member, but had gone over to the Baptists. The Baptist minister was holding the funeral, but the sanctified preacher showed up, too. He was standing off to one side, and just before the funeral started, I hear him sing out: 'Brother, I wonder if the Lord is satisfied with you, In the life that you live, And the service that you give - I wonder if the Lord is satisfied with you.'

"Yes, them 'jumped-up' songs, sung on the spur of the moment, fits in better than anything you can thing up most of the time."

Asked if she was superstitious, Henrietta said, "Me, I ain't exactly superstitious, but there's lots of old sayings I believe. One is about May rain - if you get good and wet in a May rain, you won't have no cold the balance of the year. And that is sure enough true. I always gets myself wet through in May, and I never, never has a cold.

"Ghosts? No, I don't have no trunk with them. I pray the Lord every night keep them things as far from me as he can."